

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BAMAko 01463 181337 Z

46

ACTION AF-18

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SUBJ: HOW IS MALI CHANGING: II: THE URBAN SCENE

1. I HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY IMPRESSED DURING MY TWO AND ONE- HALF YQARS HERE HOW REMARKLY HOMOGENOUS THE MALIAN PEOPLE ARE. THIS IS AS TRUE OF PEOPLE IN CITIES AS OF COUNTRYSIDE. RELIGIOUS STRIFE DOESN' T EXIST AND MARABOUTS COUNT NOT ALL. POLITICALLY, TRIBAL DIFFERENCES HAVE LITTLE IMPACT. CLASS CONFLICT, EXCEPT AS DECREASINGLY TAUGHT IN HIGHER SCHOOLS, HARD TO RECOGNIZE AND THERE NO DEEPLY FELT DIVISIONS BETWEEN A MALIAN " LEFT" AND " RIGHT". PERHAPS THIS IS BECAUSE MOST EVERYONE HERE IS POOR AND BECAUSE MORE THAN IN MOST AFRICAN COUNTRIES, SPLIT IN OUTLOOK BETWEEN CITY AND COUNTRYSIDE HAS NOT YET SHARPLY EMERGED. BAMAko IS MALI' S ONLY CITY- FAST- GROWING BUT REALLY ONLY A VERY BIG VILLAGE WHERE MOST PEOPLE' S WAY OF LIFE DOES NOT SUBSTANTIALY DIFFER FROM THAT OF THE COUNTRYSIDE. EVERY CITY FAMILY KEEPS CLOSE TOUCH WITH COUSINS WHO LIVE IN COUNTRY. MANY CITY FAMILIES HAVE FARMS AND GROW AT LEAST SOME OF THEIR OWN FOOD. EXCEPT SEASONALLY, BAMAko HAS NOT YET KNOWN EXTREME PRESSURE OF RURAL EXODUS LIKE COASTAL CITIES. URBAN SOPHISTICATION OF DAKAR AND PARTICULAR- LY ABIDJAN LOOKED DOWN ON. BAMAko IS A CITY OF HOME ENTERTAIN- MENT AND FAMILY TIES, NOT OF NIGHT CLUBS AND JET- SET LIFE.

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PAGE 02 BAMAko 01463 181337 Z

THIS IS TRUE WHETHER ONE IS A CIVIL SERVANT, WORKER OR MERCHANT. BAMAKO REMAINS MORE LIKE PRE- COLONIAL AFRICAN CITIES THAN ANY OTHER WEST AFRICAN CAPITAL.

2. YET IN LAST TWO YEARS, LIFE IN BAMAKO HAS CHANGED. LARGE NEW VILLAGES OF MUD COMPOUNDS WITH PERHAPS AS MANY AS 100,000 NEW RESIDENTS HAVE SPRUNG UP AROUND BAMAKO, AND THE NUMBER OF JOBLESS, SCHOOL DROP- OUTS OF SEMI- EMPLOYED HAS GROWN ACCORDINGLY.

NEW PARKS, MARKETS AND OTHER SIMPLE MUNICIPAL IMPROVEMENTS HAVE BEEN BUILT. AND, ON THE " MODERN SIDE", HUNDREDS OF MODERN HOUSES ARE GOING UP. ALMOST EVERY FAMILY WITH ANY PRETENSE TO POSITION OR MONEY HAS BUILT OR IS BUILDING, ON CREDIT AND OFTEN WITH OWN LABOR, A MODEST CEMENT VILLA WITH ELECTRICITY - EVEN AIR- CONDITIONERS, REFRIGERATOR, FLUSH TOILETS, AND THREE BEDROOMS REPLACING THE EVER- EXPANDABLE MUD COMPOUNDS OF JUST A FEW YEARS AGO. WIVES OF MALI' S ELITE ARE PUSHING THEIR MEN TOWARDS LIFE WITH GREATER AMENITIES. THEY KNOW WHAT THEY WANT AND WHAT THEY DON' T WANT: A GOOD HOUSE AND (USUALLY) NOT TOO MANY CHILDREN. FROM LATTER HAS COME PERHAPS BIGGEST BREAKTHROUGH OF LAST TWO YEARS: FAMILY PLANNING HAS BECOME PRATICALLY ACCEPTABLE AND HAS BEGUN TO SURFACE, AND WE HELPED BRING THIS ABOUT. IN TWO YEARS GOM HAS GONE FROM A COVERT MCNL AGREEMENT TO ALLOW A PILOT FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM TO POINT WHERE UNUSALLY FRANK DISCUSSIONS OF SEX AND CONTRACEPTION ON RADIO ARE POSSIBLE. CONSERVATIVE MALE RESISTANCE IS STILL STRONG AND IMPAKT OF PROGRAM IS STILL MINIMAL, BUT IMPORTANT START HAS BEEN MADE.

3. LIKE EVERYWHERE, MALIAN PARENTS WORRY ABOUT IMPACT OF RADIO AND POP CULTURE ON THEIR CHILDREN. ELDERS WAG THEIR HEADS ABOUT BOYS AND GIRLS IN TIGHT PANTS RIDING AROUND " A DEUX" ON MOTOR- BIKES, AND THERE IS TALK OF SEXUAL LAXITY AMONG THE YOUNG. MCNL IS PARTICULARLY CONSCIOUS OF PROBLEMS OF FLOATING GRAMMAR SCHOOL YOUTH. AS RESULT, VERY LARGE PORTION OF MALI' S NEW CLASSROOMS HAVE BEEN BUILT IN BAMAKO WHERE IN LAST TWO YEARS EVERY CHILD IS FINALLY ABLE TO GET PRIMARY EDUCATION.

4. ALL THIS HAS NOT MEANT AS MUCH CHANGE FOR CIVIL SERVANT FAMILIES AS IT HAS FOR LIFE AND STANDARDS OF MERCHANTS' FAMILIES. LATTER HAVE TRADITIONALLY BEEN COVERTLY WELL- TO- DO, OVERTLY UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 03 BAMAKO 01463 181337 Z

PSNUROUS, AND AT SAME TIME BOTH ILLITERATE AND VERY RELIGIOUS. IN LAST YEARS, MERCHANTS SEEM TO HAVE ACQUIRED NEW TASTES AND THEIR CHILDREN ARE ALREADY VERY DIFFERENT THAN THEIR PARENTS WERE AT SAME AGE. ALL THIS REPRESENTS BEGINNING, EIT JUST A BEGINNING, OF A NEW CITY WAY OF LIFE SUBSTANTIAALLY DIFFERENT FROM OLD RURAL PATTERN. IT ALSO MEANS THAT MONEY IS BEING

FOUND BY CIVIL SERVANTS FROM FAMILIES' AND WORKING WIVES TO
PAY FOR NEW HOUSES AND FOR OTHER FACETS OF GRADUALLY " IMPROVING"
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